

SELF-e 101: A Lesson for Academic Libraries in Connecting Self-Published Authors and Readers

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Abstract

SELF-e is an innovative collaboration between *Library Journal* and BiblioBoard that enables public libraries to provide curated self-published e-books to library readers in a simple and elegant way. The session will give an overview of how the program was conceived, how it works and lessons academic libraries can take as it has been implemented across the country. Representatives from BiblioBoard, *Library Journal* and NC Live will discuss how SELF-e can represent certain populations on campus—that is, student, alumni, or faculty. Ms. Cook will discuss Issues in collecting Self-Published Books for Academic Libraries. Ms. Marsh will lead exploration with the panelists on how peer review can be incorporated into these types of publishing ecosystems.

BiblioBoard Platform and Technology

Bibliolabs has created a publishing program design for authors to independently publish electronic books. The SELF-e platform enables public libraries to accept self-published submissions from their local authors and make those e-books available to patrons via participating libraries throughout their state. Libraries can make these e-books available to patrons with no checkouts or returns, and no multiuser limitations. The platform is easy to use and can accommodate any author. Authors can use the simple submission process for PDF or ePUB manuscript formats.

How *Library Journal* Got Involved

LJ has heard from librarians that they need a way to find the best self-published books. Libraries don't want to ignore this market, but desperately need guidance on a vast segment of publishing that's only minimally covered by review journals. Libraries also struggle to meet the demands of local authors who wish to sell their materials to the collection, while still purchasing traditionally published materials that are in high demand. *LJ* has a need here too: self-published materials usually don't meet their review criteria, and *LJ*

needs an alternative method of informing librarians about them.

For the past year, *LJ* worked with BiblioBoard to develop SELF-e, an e-book platform that provides the solution for self-published works for libraries. Self-published authors can submit their fiction books directly to the platform. *LJ* editors read them and identify the best ones, and these are made available to all subscribing libraries in genre modules in SELF-e. Books that are not selected for these modules can still be uploaded to a section of SELF-e that hosts books and makes them available to libraries in that state. In the future, they hope to expand SELF-e to cover nonfiction and materials for children.

How Can SELF-e and BiblioBoard Be Used in Academic and Public Libraries?

Eleanor Cook of East Carolina University Library addressed possible uses of BiblioBoard in academic libraries. The NC Live consortium (www.nclive.org) licensed BiblioBoard for all of its public and academic library members. Wake Forest University has already started planning new uses for the platform. Cook discussed how the platform could be used for faculty authors to create open textbooks and how the platform

could be used for archival and repository support. One librarian at the presentation from Baltimore County Public Library expressed how useful SELF-e is for serving local indie authors and connecting them with library patrons. She explained that authors are constantly contacting them about getting their books to the local readers and SELF-e puts the tools in the hands of authors for e-book production. New e-books can automatically become part of the collections offered by BiblioLabs. SELF-e is now in beta test at the Los Angeles Public Library, San Diego County Public Library, Ohio's Cuyahoga County Public Library, the Arizona State Library (through Reading Arizona), and the State of Massachusetts (through the Massachusetts eBook Project).

Mitchell Davis, founder and Chief Business Officer of BiblioLabs, is eager for libraries to begin using the system. "This local library aspect is the part of SELF-e that accepts every author, no matter what self-publishing service they use or whether or not their book is accepted into the LJ-curated Module. It's a space to celebrate the state's local talent and enhance the community of a region's authors and readers. We're honored to be working with such great libraries for the initial release of the service."

Los Angeles Public Library's Catherine Royalty sees SELF-e as a way to develop the library's literary community in the digital sphere. Royalty says,

"We are very excited to be partnering with *Library Journal* and BiblioBoard to showcase emerging self-published authors at the library. We plan to use the product to foster a community of local authorship and to provide our patrons with access to exciting new literary voices."

Cook agreed that these concepts of outreach to local authors could also be utilized by academic libraries. The pilot project at East Carolina University is not yet off the ground but could be modeled after the NC Live site. This portal is called "Home Grown eBooks" and includes both fiction and non-fiction e-books from North Carolina publishers. Cook has been working with a couple of faculty authors at ECU who have published consumer-oriented books on such topics as financial literacy for students and health care topics such as vegan diets for nursing mothers, for example. These topics are of general interest to the local population as well as to those on campus, but are not considered typical faculty research. Cook hopes that continued outreach to faculty about open publishing trends may present opportunities to utilize the BiblioBoard platform for materials that otherwise might go unpurchased. Academic libraries that specifically collect materials on a specific region and/or authors from their area might find the platform of use, especially since self-published materials are more likely to be available as e-books only in the future.